Kennedy X-ray storm grows

FROM OUR OWN REPORTERS

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THE CURTAIN of official silence that previously protected the Warren Commission from its critics is now, for the first time, under serious threat of being ripped aside. Two recent developments are causing acute concern to the Johnson Administration which—for perfectly understandable political reasons—has never made any secret of its desire to damp the whole controversy down.

The first is the decision of one of the commission's own lawyers to come out in the open with an insider's account of the commission's workings and findings. Mr Wesley J. Liebeler, one of the 14 senior counsel on the commission, recently signed a contract with a large New York publishing house for a book that, whatever else it does, will clearly breach the present "no comment" policy.

Resentment

Mr Liebeler, a right-wing lawyer now working at the University of Los Angeles, is understood to have been irritated with accounts such as that contained in Mr Epstein's book, "Inquest," on the way the commission went about its work. At the same time, while working on the commission, he is known to have had his own sharp differences with other members of the staff. It is believed that it was Mr Liebeler who led an abortive demand for the production before the commission of the photographs and X-ray plates taken at the autopsy on President Kennedy's body.

The question of both photographs and X-rays also overshadows the second development—which is reported to be causing even greater resentment within the White House. Recent unconfirmed reports indicate that Mr William Manchester—who has spent two years writing the Kennedy-backed, specially authorised study of the assassination, "Death of a President," due to be published next year—has lately been making additions to his original manuscript.

Two years after the Warren Commission's report into the assassination of President Kennedy a crucial doubt remains: was there a second assassin? The Warren Commission said not, but, as we show in the diagrams on the right, its answer rested on the theory that one bullet must have hit two men—a theory that is seriously challenged in two books published in Britain last week (reviewed on page 11 by Lord Devlin). Meanwhile, evidence that might shed light on these central problems—the photographs and X-rays taken at the autopsy—remains mysteriously hidden.

These will take account of the widespread attention now being paid both to the whereabouts and the significance of those photographs and X-ray plates.

The most widely accepted theory in Washington is that for almost three years the pictures have been kept in a Government vault to which the Kennedy family has access. It is now being suggested that in the past few weeks Mr Manchester has been granted permission to see the pictures and that in his forthcoming book he will be in a position to clear up at least some of the mysteries that currently surround them.

Amateur film

The photographs and X-rays would almost certainly shed light on the central problem of whether there was more than one assassin, as argued by Mark Lane and Edward J. Epstein in their attacks on the Warren Commission's findings.

Theories about a second assassin stem from a conclusion in the Warren Commission report that a single bullet struck President Kennedy and then went on to cause all the wounds to Governor Connally. According to the commission, this bullet hit Kennedy at the base of the neck, exited at his throat and then struck Connally.

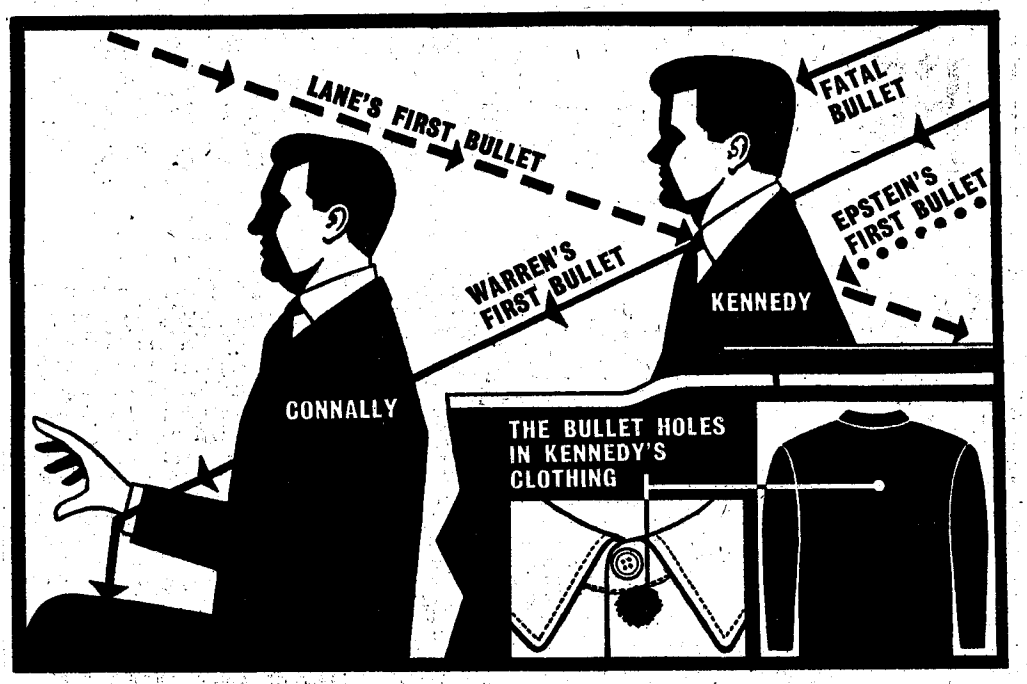
A later bullet shattered Kennedy's brain—this could have been fired from the same gun, according to the one eye-witness amateur film taken of the assassination and the time that it would take to fire the bolt-action rifle used by Lee Harvey Oswald. However, if Kennedy's shoulder and throat wounds, plus Connally's wounds, were not caused by the same bullet, it is highly unlikely—if not impossible—that yet another bullet could have been fired in the time from Oswald's gun. Therefore—the argument runs—there must have been a second assassin.

No autopsy

Unfortunately, on orders from the Secret Service, the Dallas hospital to which Kennedy was taken was not permitted to perform an autopsy. In an attempt to save the President's life, doctors there performed a tracheotomy by extending the throat wound. This may have confused other doctors who performed the post-mortem examination at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, Maryland, that night after the body had been taken back to Washington.

The FBI maintained at the time that the medical examination of the President's body showed that the bullet in the back penetrated "less than a finger length." Also, in evidence before the commission, both Governor Connally and his wife said that they thought the Governor was hit by a separate bullet from the one which hit the President.

Epstein has flatly stated his conviction that the original autopsy report was amended, before being published in the Warren Commission report, to fit the single-bullet theory. The Warren Commission report was hurried in production and, it is now being claimed, was written to silence public concern over the possibility of a second assassin being at large—rather than in an impartial attempt to unearth the truth.



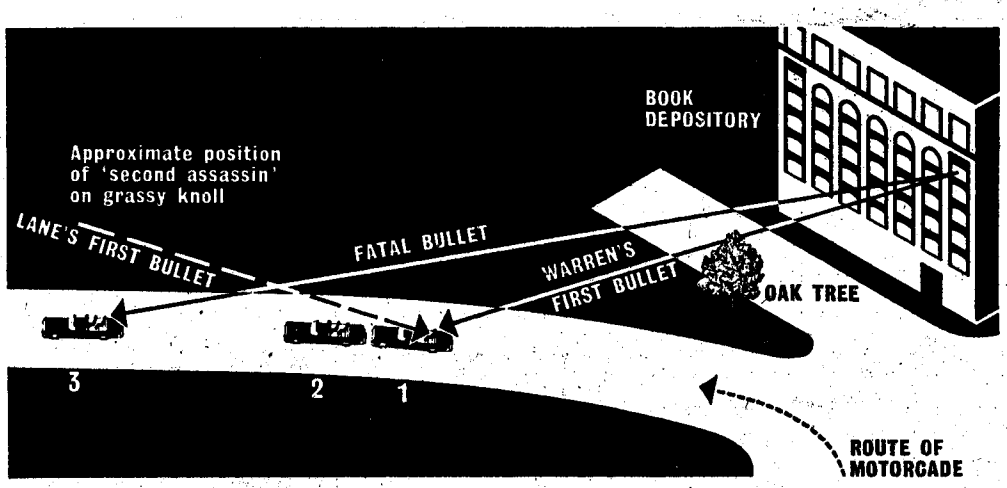
How death struck in Dallas

The Warren Commission found 'persuasive evidence' that the first bullet entered the base of Kennedy's neck and exited at the front, then passed through Connally's chest and struck his wrist and thigh.

Lane argues that the hole in the throat was an entrance wound, not an exit wound, produced by a shot from in front.

Epstein argues from the first FBI report of the assassination that Kennedy's back was pierced six inches below the collar-line (he cites Kennedy's jacket and shirt, drawings of which are shown above, in support of this theory) and that a downward-directed bullet could not have exited from his throat.

He suggests that the small hole in Kennedy's throat was caused by a fragment from the fatal bullet which struck Kennedy's head. Photographs and X-rays known to have been taken at Bethesda Naval Hospital—and which are now missing—might contain vital evidence on these points.



Car position 1—where Kennedy was first struck, according to the film of the assassination. (The oak tree obscured the view from the Book Depository before that point.)

Car position 2—where, approximately 1.8 seconds later, Connally was seen to slump forward.

Car position 3—where—according to all versions—Kennedy received the fatal bullet in the head.

The rifle found in the Book Depository could not have fired twice in 1.8 seconds. Therefore: Kennedy and Connally were struck by the same bullet (the Warren Commission's finding)—or there was more than one assassin.

LANE advances the theory, based on evidence of eye-witnesses not called by the Warren Commission, that some shots came from a grassy knoll behind a fence in front of the motorcade.

EPSTEIN argues that some of the medical evidence, and the evidence of Kennedy's clothes, are strong points against the Warren Commission's finding that Kennedy and Connally were struck by the same bullet.